Australian Government
Department of Health

The Department of Health

PATTERNS OF USE AND HARMS ASSOCIATED WITH SPECIFIC POPULATIONS OF METHAMPHETAMINE USERS IN AUSTRALIA - EXPLORATORY RESEARCH (/INTERNET/PUBLICATIONS/PUBLISHING.NSF/CONTENT/PHD-NPI-METHAMPHETAMINE-REPORT-FEB09-L)

6. Specific types of methamphetamine users and behavioural contexts

Page last updated: February 2008

6.1 Overview of behavioural contexts and target audiences
6.2 Social use
6.3 Functional users
6.4 Dependent users

6.1 Overview of behavioural contexts and target audiences

When attempting to categorise users, the research found that discriminating factors relate more to behaviour and motivation for use rather than purely demographic factors. While demographic and socio-economic status both play a role, it was apparent that the how, why and when someone uses is better understood through the behavioural context in which drugs are used in addition to the particular methamphetamine(s) one considers using.

This was consistent across all the target audiences specified in the research brief, with the one exception of younger people (16-24 years) living in regional communities. For this group the demographic variables of geographic location and age were a strong indicator of their pattern of drug use. Users in this target audience indicated that methamphetamine use was typically a habitual weekend experience. Boredom appeared to be a key factor contributing to this, with many respondents claiming that they were unsure of what people do on a weekend if they are young and living in a regional community if they did not go out and use drugs. It was apparent that the smaller social networks in these communities resulted in the perception that there is limited choice of social interaction apart from with people who use drugs, and going to venues where drugs are found.

With the exception of this target audience, feedback from the specific target audiences resulted in three distinct behavioural contexts emerging. These included

1. Social Use: motivated by the disinhibitory effects of methamphetamines
2. Functional Use: motivated by the enabling effects of methamphetamines and
3. Dependent Use: motivated by the perception of normality from reliance on methamphetamines.

Table 5 provides an overview of how the target audiences for the research fall into these behavioural contexts. It illustrates how each of the behavioural contexts can be further categorised into more specific behavioural sub-groups. Section 6.2, section 6.3 and section 6.4 discuss these in detail.

Table 5: Target audiences and behavioural contexts

Top of page

Table 5 is presented as a list in this HTML version for accessibility reasons. It is presented as a table in the PDF version.

Target audience:

- Young (18-24)
  - Social - blockers **
  - Social - dabblers **
  - Social - Preferrers *
  - Functional - manic Mondays *
- Uni students
  - Social - blockers **
  - Social - dabblers **
  - Social - Preferrers *
  - Functional - slippers *
- Rave partiers
  - Social - blockers *
  - Social - celebrators *
  - Social - dabblers **
  - Social - preferrers *
  - Functional - manic Mondays *
  - Functional - slippers *
- General (25+)
  - Social - blockers *
  - Social - celebrators **
  - Social - dabblers **
  - Social - preferrers **
  - Functional - manic Mondays *
  - Functional - slippers *
  - Dependents - ice zealots **
  - Dependents - meth devotees **
  - Dependents - heroin co-dependents **
- Drivers
  - Functional - workers **
  - Dependents - Meth devotees *
- Construction/labor
  - Social - dabblers *
  - Social - preferrers *
  - Functional - manic Mondays *
  - Functional - slippers *
  - Functional - workers **
  - Dependents - ice zealots *

    - Dependents - meth devotees *
- Hospitality
    - Social - dabblers *
    - Social - preferrers *
    - Functional - manic Mondays *
    - Functional - slippers *
    - Functional - workers *
    - Dependents - ice zealots *
- Rural/regional
    - Social - dabblers *
    - Social - preferrers **
    - Functional - manic Mondays *
    - Functional - slippers *
- Sex workers
    - Functional - workers **
    - Dependents - meth devotees *

Key:

* indicates where target audiences also used in this context, but to a lesser extent.

** indicates the target audience where usage was most prevalent.

6.2 Social use

Top of page

Social use of methamphetamines is primarily motivated by the drugs' ability to reduce inhibitions. Users claim to experience enhanced confidence and increased ability or motivation to converse with others. Other key motivations for use include enhanced energy and stamina, alertness and physical senses of touch, smell, sight, and sound. The majority of those using in a social context claim that methamphetamines give an intensity and an ‘edge’ to social experiences, almost allowing them to venture into a different dimension. Used in this context, most social users consider methamphetamines to be 'normal' and 'socially acceptable', although acceptance of specific methamphetamine forms and the frequency of their use vary.

There are common behavioural characteristics that define social users which are distinct from other user groups. Firstly, drug use in this context is always in association with parties, clubs, social events and gatherings which involve other people. In fact, sharing the experience with others is a critical element of the appeal and is often the focal point of the occasion. This is in contrast to other groups where the focal point may be considered the drug itself. For most social users, using alone is commonly frowned upon as this is considered as more consistent with drug dependent behaviour rather than social use.

As a group, social users are also unique because of the parameters they place on their usage. More so than other user groups, social users place definable boundaries around their drug intake to ensure that use is kept under control. These boundaries are defined even more carefully when the methamphetamine being used is ice. The quotes below provide some examples of the parameters that social users place on their drug use:

> *"If I catch myself falling into the trap of doing it multiple days, binges, then I’ll have a break for a few months, just let myself chill and relax and get perspective again, I'm very careful."*

> *"If I start overdoing it I have anywhere up to 6 months break and then I'll start having it again."*

"I don't use everyday and I don't take more than anyone else around me is. It's only to go out on…you'd never do base by yourself…its no fun then".

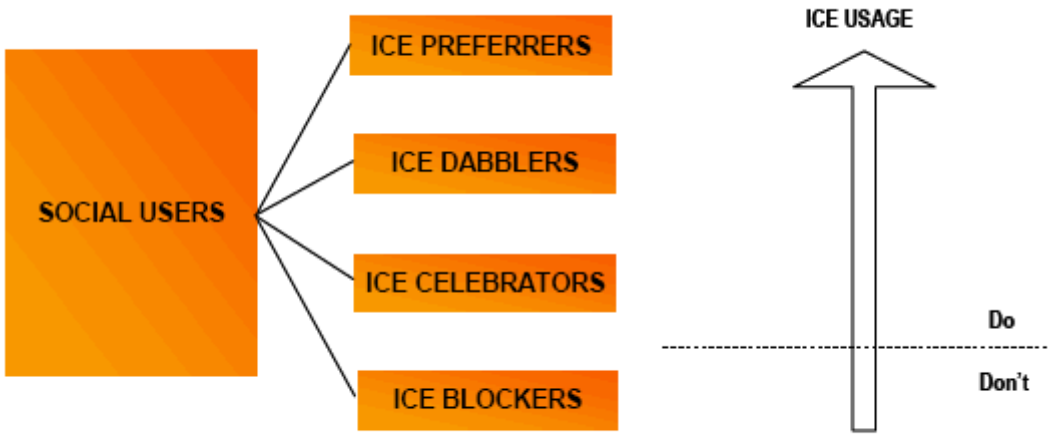
"I'd never take drugs at work".

In comparison to other user groups, social users also appear to place greater importance on maintaining goals and an interest in non-drug activities such as their employment of studies, and in circles of friends who are not regular drug users. They tend to place a greater onus on maintaining good health than other user groups. As long as these self-imposed personal parameters are in place, and use is relatively occasional as opposed to everyday, the consensus is that use of methamphetamines in a social context is relatively low risk.

Types of social users

Social users of methamphetamines are able to be segmented into four distinct sub groups based on their attitudes and behaviour toward ice. Figure 4 shows each of these four sub groups and their relative ice usage. Each is discussed in detail below.

Figure 4: Social user sub groups



Text version of Figure 4

This diagram shows social users split into four groups: ice preferrers, ice dabblers, ice celebrators and ice blockers. Ice blockers do not use ice. The other three groups use ice, with usage increasing from ice celebrators, through ice dabblers, to ice preferrers.

Ice blockers

Top of page

Ice Blockers are methamphetamines users who do not use ice. While they are motivated to use other methamphetamines in a social context for the effects described above, Ice Blockers make a conscious decision not to use ice. While drug use may still be as frequent as every weekend or fortnight, this group's preference is for what they perceive a 'safer' repertoire of drugs. Most commonly, this includes speed, base, ecstasy (commonly known as pills among methamphetamine users) and marijuana. To a lesser extent, LSD and magic mushrooms are also used.

For Ice Blockers, the comparative potency and associated risks are considered to be leagues apart from other methamphetamines, so much so that its benefits are not perceived to outweigh potential risks. There is a fear around ice-taking, which cause this group to abstain from use. This fear is based on either one of two things:

- The fear of side-effects from using ice, particularly those highlighted in the recent ice advertising campaign. Ice Blockers with this fear consider ice 'evil' or the 'monster' drug or
- The fear of the irresistibility of ice, whereby Ice Blockers consider ice as 'so good, it's bad'.

The first of these fears is typically found among younger methamphetamine users aged 16-24 years, who are usually students and rave party attendees. This group have not tried ice before. Their fears are often based on things they have seen in the media, in advertising and stories heard through friends, rather than personal experience. Often these are specific side effects such as uncontrolled scratching, the potential for immediate addiction, and possible psychotic episodes. However, their fear can also be more generalised, relating both to the social stigma that the general community is believed to associate with using ice, and the potential for the intense effects of the drug to cause them to behave in a way which results in social disgrace among peers. While most are adamant they would never try ice, they claim to regularly use other drugs such as speed, base and pills.

In contrast, those that fear the irresistibility of ice are typically older users (25+ years), commonly including professionals, older ravers and gay, lesbian and bisexual users. These people have usually tried ice before in a social context, and subsequently believe the increased potency and effects of the drug are appealing enough that they could potentially become addicted if given further opportunity to use.

> *"It's like super speed. You can just see the potential addictiveness when you take it, so to me it's like 'oh no stay away from it'."*

For these Ice Blockers it is the fear of losing control of their ability to manage their drug use that prevents them from using ice. They believe that if they lost control over their use, they would become exposed to the long term risks that are considered to be inevitably associated with any drug addiction. This belief strengthens their resolve not to use ice again. Instead, Ice Blockers who fear the irresistibility of ice also limit their drug usage to speed, base and pills.

Ice dabblers

Top of page

Ice Dabblers use ice opportunistically. That is, while ice is neither their drug of choice nor a drug they proactively seek, they will use it on occasions when it is offered by others. For this sub group, the motivations for use of ice are primarily peer driven and centre around a desire to be on 'the same level' and sharing the same experience as their friends.

> *"I would use it if someone offered it to me but I would never buy it."*

> *"The night is about being with my friends so I'm happy to take whatever they're having so that I can be on the same level and share the experience".*

Ice Dabblers encompass a range of target audiences, most commonly ravers, gay, lesbian and bisexual users, hospitality, university students and people from rural and regional areas. This group includes both young and old users and people with a range of occupational aptitudes from skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled working categories.

Attitudes toward drug taking among this group tend to be somewhat laissez-faire. If the drug is perceived as coming from a known, trusted source, most are receptive to taking almost any drug socially. Heroin is perhaps the only exception to this. Pills and speed are usually preferred by this sub group, partly due to the ease of administering when in public, although many claim to also use base relatively regularly. Ironically, many Ice Dabblers have a low regard for ice compared with other drugs. However, unlike Ice Blockers, when faced with the opportunity to use it among peers, they typically find it easier to submit rather than resist.

> *"You try and stop yourself and you try and stop your friends from getting involved in it but sometimes it just creeps into the circle and you find yourself taking it."*

Given their relaxed attitude to drug taking, it was not surprising that poly drug use is very common among Ice Dabblers. On any

given night out, often a mix of drugs are taken. This mix may or may not include ice, depending on availability and social company. For a minority, when ice does feature, its inclusion may be a main focus of the night with use occurring at a house party or even before going out to pubs or clubs. However, for most of this social sub group, when ice is used it is often introduced during the later stages of the evening at someone's house after leaving a dance venue or club. When asked to describe how ice is used, this social sub group often reported behaviour that was similar to that described below:

- speed before going out
- followed by one or a number of pills once out
- then additional speed later in the night to enhance and sustain the effects of the pill
- for some, alcohol may also be consumed throughout the stay at the venue, although this can depend on the venue and tended to occur less at venues such as raves and then
- a smaller more intimate group of friends would return to someone's house for a 'kick on' / or 'come down party'.

It is at this latter stage, that marijuana and ice are most likely to feature. Which of the two drugs used appears to depend on availability and the intended length of the party. Use of ice will ensure that party continues much longer than if marijuana is used.

Frequency of methamphetamine use for this sub group depends on the age and social interests of each individual. Similarly, whether they use ice or not will depend on age and social interests. Some follow a poly drug use pattern such as that described above as frequently as every weekend, while others only do so once every 6-12 months. Depending on the drug and the users' personal preference, the most common forms of administration of methamphetamines among this group include either snorting, ingesting or smoking.

In comparison to other drugs, Ice Dabblers only use ice occasionally. For some it is limited to only one or two previous experiences. Despite this, it is important to recognise that the low frequency of use among this group is usually a consequence of limited exposure, rather than an act of will or discipline. That is, the limited use of many Ice Dabblers is due to external reasons such as infrequent social contact with their 'ice' circle of friends, limited availability among their peer group, or infrequent attendance at 'kick on' parties where ice is most likely to be available.

Ice celebrators

Top of page

Ice Celebrators are those social users that consciously limit their ice usage to special occasions. Based on the drug's increased purity and potency, Ice Celebrators regard ice as a more 'exclusive' drug experience, and claim to have respect for its effects, both good and bad. While they may or may not use other drugs on a regular basis, they typically limit their ice intake for special, infrequent occasions such as all-weekend rave events, special birthdays, certain festivals, weddings, New Years parties and so on. Their ice intake is usually planned ahead of time, and unlike many other occasional users, Ice Celebrators typically initiate the purchase rather than rely on the drug being offered to them.

This sub group are typically older (25-35 years), and include professionals, gay, lesbian and bisexual users and older ravers. Most Ice Celebrators have been attending the 'rave scene' for many years, and generally have a relaxed attitude toward drug taking in this context.

The frequency with which Ice Celebrators use other methamphetamines is strongly dependent on their existing active interest in clubbing and raves. Frequent clubbing appears to correlate with higher use of speed and base, while infrequent use typically relates to users tiring of the rave 'scene'. Some Ice Celebrators claim to now only use drugs infrequently, for example, every 6-12 months. In these instances, ice is often the only drug they would use.

Ice preferrers

Top of page

Ice Preferrers are the social users who claim ice as their drug of choice. While other drugs may be used occasionally, ice is the primary drug they seek for use in a social context. Ice Preferrers are categorised by their preference of ice being based on the potency of the drug due to its purity and the intensity of experiences this provides. This is in direct contrast to other social user sub groups, who are either frightened of the intensity of the purity and experiences (Ice Blockers), or

simply prefer the lower intensity of other methamphetamines (Ice Dabblers). Ice Preferrers differ from Ice Celebrators in terms of perceptions of suitable occasions for use. For Ice Celebrators the drug's potency and intensity is why it is saved for special occasions. For Ice Preferrers, these characteristics are why they use it for any social occasion. Many claimed to have moved to ice from a previous preference for speed and see it as providing better value for money than other methamphetamines. These unique motivations are illustrated by the quotes below.

> *"Ice has killed speed now because it's the same thing but so much more effective".*
>
> *"The hit just seems cleaner than the other drugs".*
>
> *"You get more bang for your buck".*

Ice Preferrers are typically older, with a greater frequency drug use. They are from a range of occupations, encompassing professionals and unskilled workers and include the gay, lesbian and bisexual, general users aged 25 plus years, and older regional and rural target audiences. University students and ravers are less common in this social sub group than others.

Unlike other social users, Ice Preferrers' social interests are not about going out, dancing and meeting new people. This may be due to the relative unavailability of clubs and rave parties, for example in regional and rural areas, or due to undesirability with users feeling they have out grown the club or rave scene. For this sub group, the focus of the social occasion is in enjoying intense conversation and shared experiences with an 'inner circle' of friends. A house party with close friends is a typical context for use. Circulating the ice pipe is often an essential part of the shared experience, and carries the same sense of social interaction as passing a joint[17]. Many claimed that smoking ice in this context often continues throughout the night and into the next day.

As it is their drug of preference, Ice Preferrers usually have some on hand. This results in increased frequency of ice use in comparison to other social user sub groups. Ice Preferrers typically claim to use the drug weekly, or at least fortnightly.

> *"Most Fridays we'll have a few friends come over and we'll just sit around smoking and drinking, playing some music".*
>
> *"I may smoke on and off throughout the weekend with my partner, or when people drop by".*

While smoking is the most common route of administration for Ice Preferrers, a minority prefer to either inject or snort, preferring the longer, more fulfilling high.

> *"Smoking it is just so wasteful, you always need more".*

Summary of social user sub groups across target audiences

Table 6 summarises which of the target audiences are more prevalent in each of the four social user sub groups described above.

Table 6: Summary of social user sub groups across target audiences

Top of page

Table 6 is presented as a list in this HTML version for accessibility reasons. It is presented as a table in the PDF version.

Summary of social user sub groups (blockers, celebrators, dabblers and preferrers) across target audiences:

- Young (18-24)
  - Blockers **
  - Dabblers **

- Uni students
  - Blockers **
  - Dabblers **
- Rave partiers
  - Blockers *
  - Celebrators *
  - Dabblers **
- General (25+)
  - Blockers *
  - Celebrators **
  - Dabblers **
  - Preferrers **
- GLBT
  - Blockers *
  - Celebrators *
  - Dabblers **
  - Preferrers **
- Drivers
  - n/a
- Constructions/labour
  - Dabblers *
  - Preferrers *
- Hospitality
  - Dabblers *
  - Preferrers *
- Rural/regional
  - Dabblers *
  - Preferrers **
- Sex workers
  - n/a

Note: * indicates less prevalence

** indicates greater prevalence.

For each target audience, if a sub group is not listed indicates little or no apparent representation of target audience in the behavioural sub group.

6.3 Functional users

Top of page

Functional use of methamphetamines is primarily motivated by the enabling effect of the drugs. Achieving a certain task is what use in this context is based upon. Most often, this refers to functioning in employment. In this context, methamphetamines are used to enhance confidence, alertness, concentration, motivation, energy and stamina, or suppress appetite and lose weight. Increases in one or all of these characteristics effectively enable the user to achieve the task more quickly or with greater thoroughness.

Attitudes of functional users to methamphetamine use differ markedly to that of social users. While social users readily recognise the illicit nature of their drug use, functional users are less inclined to. Those who use in this context self-permit methamphetamine use by justifying it as a 'means to an end'. Further, many functional users are reluctant to see themselves as drug takers, particularly the more regular users. Instead, many see themselves as workers simply trying to get the job done or people with a goal to achieve.

Feedback from the research suggests the prevalence of methamphetamine use in a functional context at the workplace is relatively widespread. Not only was it claimed to be used in many unskilled or semi-skilled roles, such as trades and construction, labouring, driving, hospitality and sex workers but also in more professional roles such as IT, management, finance, and in the area of health. University students can also be included in this behavioural context when using to study or to complete assignments to meet a deadline. Drug use in this context is considered acceptable, and in small number of cases, even expected:

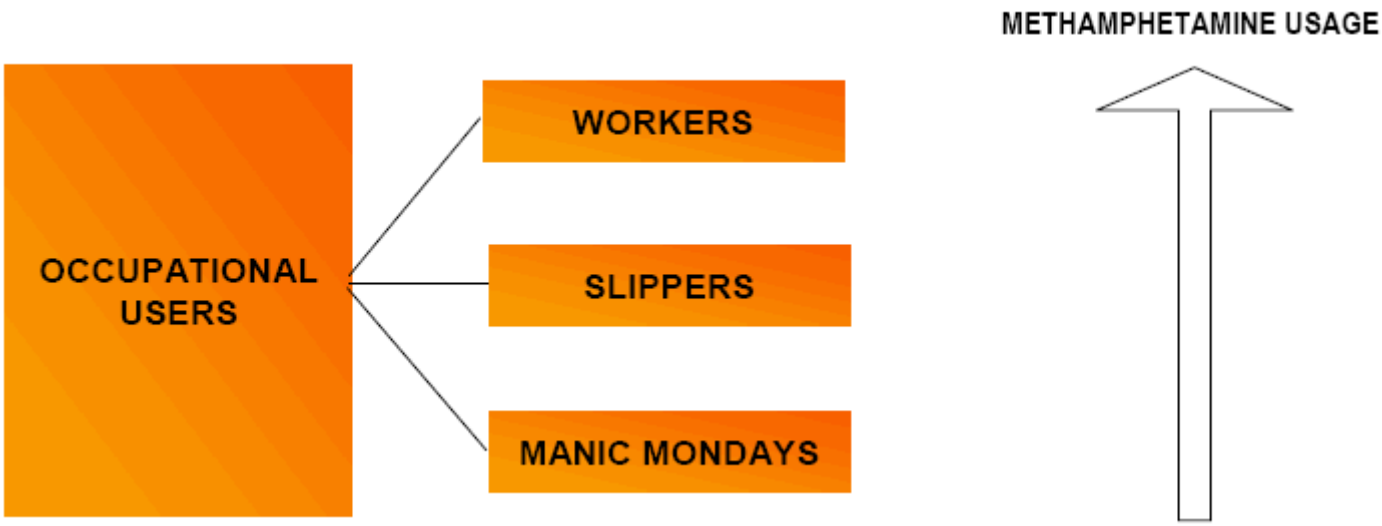
> *"A lot of people at my work do use drugs but we don't have drug tests so it's fine"*

Speed and base are the common choice of methamphetamine used in this behavioural context. The longer lasting, lower intensity effects of the these two drugs compared to ice, mean they are considered more suitable for tasks of longer duration such as a day labouring, long periods of time spent driving or concentrating on details. Although not as common as speed or base, ice is used in a functional context particularly by those who require a more intense effect over a shorter period of time. For example, some sex workers found ice useful for the increase in stamina and disinhibitory effect that it produced over the short term. A minority of other functional users used ice rather than speed or base as it was their drug of preference socially, so it is usually readily available.

Types of functional users

Like social users, sub groups of functional users were able to be identified. Although similar in many ways, sub groups of functional users were able to be differentiated according to levels of use and attitudes toward methamphetamine usage.

Figure 5: Functional user sub groups



Text version of Figure 5

This diagram shows occupational users split into three groups: Workers, Slippers, and Manic Mondays. Methamphetamine usage increases from Manic Mondays, through Slippers, to Workers.

Manic Mondays

Top of page

Manic Mondays are social users who have experienced a lapse in discipline. This user group can encompass any one of the target audiences involved in the social use of speed or ice. Target audiences that regularly use methamphetamines to go out to a venue or club, such as gay, lesbian and bisexual users, ravers, young people, university students, hospitality workers, labourers, and those from regional and rural communities are particularly susceptible to falling into this category. However, this functional sub group was most prevalent among general users aged 25 years and over.

The key difference between the Manic Mondays sub group and social users is that they have allowed themselves to break one of their own rules of not using at work, and have let their weekend drug use flow into the first day of their work week. While this is typically a Monday, it could be also be a Tuesday or Wednesday for groups such as hospitality workers or students.

Manic Mondays still have a social user's attitude to drug taking, that is, it is very much a social activity to do with friends to enhance the social experience at a club or house party. However, occasionally, when the social occasion has lasted longer than normal - "a big weekend" - Manic Mondays allow themselves to use in the morning before work rather than call in sick. Essentially they are compensating for not limiting the amount of partying or drug taking that occurred on the weekend as social users will do.

This sub group fear taking methamphetamines at work for a number of reasons. They fear being caught by their employer and potentially losing their job. Further, they believe that once a person starts using regularly at work, they are at risk of becoming dependent. For these reasons, functional use in this context was claimed to be very rare. When it occurs, it is considered an absolute 'necessity':

> *"I would never normally take drugs on a Monday, but I'd barely slept the night before so I needed something to keep me awake".*

Slippers

Slippers are functional users who regularly use methamphetamines to get through the working day or a specific task. Usually they are workers or students who use drugs to help them function throughout their working or study week in addition to social use on weekends. Typically, they evolve from Manic Mondays as their attitudes and behaviours have become more comfortable with regular, mid-week use after having taken once or twice at work as Manic Mondays with no repercussions. Despite being aware of some of the immediate risks and effects of methamphetamine use, Slippers believe they function relatively normally in this state and inadvertently place themselves at risk of becoming more regular functional users.

Slippers usually encompass the same target audiences as Manic Mondays, although some other groups fall directly into this category. Some university students regularly use methamphetamines to enhance their energy and concentration for study and assignments. These students will actively seek out methamphetamines specifically for this reason, rather than simply to recover from using them the night before. A small number of respondents, usually women, were also identified to fall into the Slippers category as their primary motivation for using methamphetamines was to suppress appetite and lose weight. As stated by one:

> *"I've been on a meth diet this week, trying to lose weight for my holiday"*

A number of Indigenous women claimed weight loss as the primary motivator for beginning to use methamphetamines in the first place. They claimed that this was often at the encouragement of their friends or family.

Speed and base, or drugs like dexamphetamine are the preference for functional users in this sub group. Ice may be used on the odd occasion, depending on what was taken the night(s) before and is available on hand, but it was not uncommon for some Slippers to avoid ice altogether due to a fear of the risks and potency (typically younger/ university students). Others may dabble in ice socially, but its use was not perceived as appropriate in a functional context, due to the intensity of the high is making it difficult to concentrate. Further, the length of the comedown experienced when using ice defeats the purpose of having to use

drugs to get through the day. The quotes below illustrate the preference of Slippers for speed and base:

> *"(speed is) a longer hit, and not as high, so at least you can still function properly".*

> *"I'd never do speed or ice at uni, but a couple of dexies is nothing to help me get through".*

The typical routes of administration for methamphetamines in this context is snorting, smoking, and ingesting. Rarely are they injected.

Workers

Top of page

Workers stand apart from other functional groups. This sub group uses methamphetamines almost exclusively for functional reasons, usually improving performance on the job, rather than as part of a social interaction. The key distinction between Workers and other functional user groups is that they are more self-permitting of their own usage behaviour. They are also more frequent users.

Workers are the least likely of all the functional sub groups to consider themselves as illicit drug users. Unlike other sub groups, their drug use is a 'necessity' for keeping their job, not as something that could potentially cause job loss. The research found that functional use in this context was more prevalent in certain industries, particularly those requiring heavy or continuous labour, late shifts or long hours. Some examples of the occupations of respondents that fall into the Workers category include construction, truck and taxi drivers, road workers, sex workers, dancers and hospitality workers, and trades such as plumbers and electricians.

> *"There's no shortage of workers, and so many of them are much younger, stronger and faster than us older blokes. I need the extra strength (drugs) give me, otherwise I'm without a job" (construction worker).*

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a small minority of employers accept, and even encourage, drug use. Often, however, it is still an unspoken behaviour within the workplace. The quotes below provide some examples of functional use as an expected part of employment.

> *"I know a site where it's common knowledge the boss actually puts speed in the water to get all the blokes to work faster" (labour worker).*

> *"The boss knows what's going on. There's no way we could meet his deadlines without (drugs)" (truck driver).*

Base or speed are usually the preferred methamphetamine used by Workers, partly due to ease of administration. White powder can be easily scooped onto a finger, or other device such as a door key, and snorted, ingested or sprinkled in a cigarette. Both powder and paste (base) easily stirred into water.

The other reason while these forms of methamphetamine are preferred is due to the more consistent, sustained high they provide. This makes them more appropriate for longer shifts lasting 6-8 hour shifts. A small number of sex workers and dancers were the only exception to this preference. For this small group, ice was preferred for the more intense, more disinhibitory high it provides over a shorter period of time. In this instance, the route of administration tended to be smoking or injecting.

Behaviours among Workers often border on dependency with use being frequent and sometimes continuous, over comparatively longer periods. This could be anywhere from 4 to 7 days in succession depending on the role. In order to avoid the effects of the comedown, drug use may unintentionally carry over to time spent outside of employment, such as the weekend or day off.

Workers in industries where employment is short term contractual or where there is a high degree of competition for roles, such as labouring and construction, often feel trapped into continued use. Even if they are consciously aware of their increasing reliance on drugs, they perceive that stopping use will require taking time off to detox. This in turn means no or low productivity

and potential loss of job, resulting in financial problems. Other Workers in competitive employment or more flexible roles, such as some drivers and self-employed professionals, claimed they control the habit through self-imposed detox breaks every few days.

Summary of functional user sub groups across target audiences

Table 7 summarises which of the target audiences are more prevalent in each of the three functional user sub groups described above.

Table 7: Summary of functional user sub groups across target audiences

Top of page

Table 7 is presented as a list in this HTML version for accessibility reasons. It is presented as a table in the PDF version.

Summary of functional user sub groups (manic Mondays, slippers and workers) across target audiences:

- Young (18-24)
  - Manic Mondays *
- Uni students
  - Slippers *
- Rave partiers
  - Manic Mondays *
  - Slippers *
- General (25+)
  - Manic Mondays **
  - Slippers **
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual
  - Manic Mondays *
  - Slippers *
- Drivers
  - Workers **
- Construction/labour
  - Manic Mondays *
  - Slippers *
  - Workers **
- Hospitality
  - Manic Mondays *
  - Slippers *
  - Workers *
- Rural/regional
  - Manic Mondays *
  - Slippers *
  - Workers **
- Sex workers

- n/a

Note: * indicates less prevalence

** indicates greater prevalence.

For each target audience, if a sub group is not listed indicates little or no apparent representation of target audience in the behavioural sub group.

6.4 Dependent users

Top of page

For the purpose of this research dependent use has been categorised using the following definition: 'uncontrollable, compulsive drug seeking and use, even in the face of negative health and social consequences' [18]. This definition has been used as it encompasses both psychological as well as physical dependence. Both health and social problems are included as indicators of addiction, rather than symptoms related to physical withdrawal being used as the only determining factor.

Therefore, users in the dependent behavioural context have been determined based upon their claims of uncontrollable, compulsive cravings that cause them to use methamphetamines repeatedly. This can be a craving for either the drug, or the act of taking the drug (particularly injecting). Many within this behavioural context were motivated to use methamphetamines by the sense of 'normality' they believed the drugs provided, allowing them to 'get through the day'. Other motivations for use include the temporary escape that methamphetamine use provides from mental and lifestyle problems, and for many injectors, it is the psychological fulfilment gained from using the needle. The quotes below articulate these motivations.

> *"I just can't do much but stay in bed unless I have it".*
>
> *"The only time I feel normal and able to face the world is when I'm using".*
>
> *"It's an escape...I don't have to think about my life and myself".*
>
> *"It's all about the feel of the steel".*

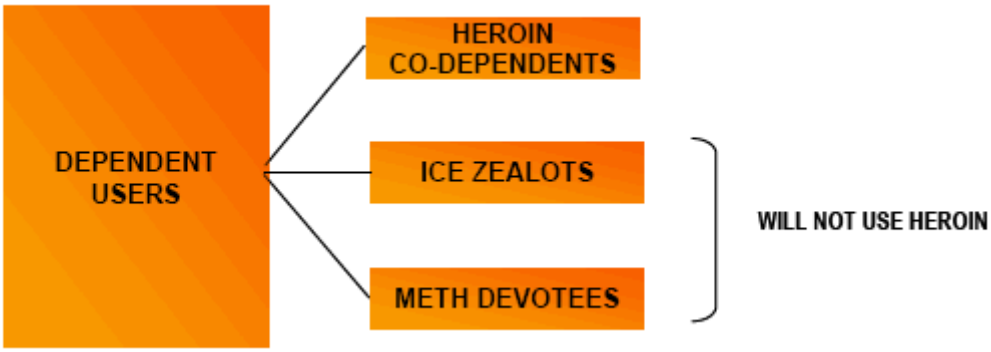
Use in this context is typically much 'heavier' than other user groups both in terms of frequency and dosage. Frequency of use among dependent users ranges from 3-4 days per week to several times per day. In regards to dosage, many claim to have built up a tolerance by this stage of drug taking and as a result are having more than one hit at a time to feel the effects[19]. In addition, the more pure forms of methamphetamines such as base or ice were used.

Dependents come from a broad cross-section of society. Some are from low socio-economic or unemployed backgrounds, while others work in skilled and semi-skilled employment, for example, clerical positions, nursing, IT, and finance. Although dependents are typically older than social users, usually aged 30 and above, some are as young as 25 years. The degree to which dependents appear to function within mainstream society tends to differ significantly according to both the primary drug used and the primary mode of administration.

Types of dependent users

Like other behavioural user groups, dependents also comprise a number of sub groups. Differences between these groups relate to demographic, poly drug behaviours, attitudes toward ice and mode of administration.

Figure 6: Dependent user sub groups



Text version of figure 6

This diagram shows dependent users split into three groups: heroin co-depentents, ice zealots and meth devotees. Ice zealots and meth devotees will not use heroin.

Meth devotees and ice zealots

Top of page

Meth Devotees and Ice Zealots are similar in some regards. Both groups crave the high achieved through methamphetamines, and dislike the idea of heroin. Both use it as a functional and social enabler.

> *"Why would you do slowey when you can use goey?"*

The majority of both sub groups include users who are in employment. As many place high importance on maintaining this foot hold in mainstream society, this often involves keeping their addiction confidential.

These sub groups also have some marked differences. 'Meth devotees' are typically older (aged 30 years or over) and cross the spectrum of occupations from skilled, unskilled to unemployed. They rarely use in a social context and their drug of preference is speed or base, although they will use ice if these are unavailable. Often they have been using methamphetamines for a extended period of time, and will often regard these drugs in the same way others regard their 'morning coffee' – as a necessary pick me up in the morning. The primary mode of administration is injection, although a minority snort. Meth Devotees are unlikely to be poly drug users.

In contrast, Ice Zealots are typically younger (aged 25-30 years), and are more likely to be unskilled, unemployed or part time workers. They use regularly in a social context, although this is more likely to be at house parties than going out to clubs or dance venues. The primary difference between these users and the 'Ice Preferrers' social user sub group, is that Ice Zealots use frequently alone throughout the week as they work flexible hours or not at all. Ice Zealots prefer the purity and intensity of ice to other methamphetamines, and their primary mode of administration is smoking. As they still use drugs regularly in social situations, they also regularly come into contact with and use other drugs such as speed, ecstasy and marijuana [20].

The impetus to dependency also differs between the two groups. For Ice Zealots, dependency appears to be more of a gradual slide from social smoking to more regular, solitary use. Some examples are provided the quotes below.

> *"It's something about the smoke, I just found myself wanting more and more. I'd put the pipe down and then 2 hours later I'd want it again. I'd wake up in the morning and want more".*

> *"My boyfriend and I used to do it together, and still do. But I'll also sneak it during the day now when he's at work and the baby's asleep."*

Meth Devotees, on the other hand, often relate their dependent use to a trauma or other instance in their life where they allowed their personal parameters on usage to slip. Examples included loss of a job, a relationship break up and being a victim of abuse. For one respondent, it was the dramatic increases he noticed in his productivity at that was the specific cause of his now

dependent use. Again, the quotes below contain examples.

> *"I use to only do it occasionally. One day I walked home to find my girlfriend in bed with my best friend and I couldn't deal with it, drugs were my escape. That was 10 years ago now."*

> *"I only ever used on a Friday night…I was a weekend only girl, until that bastard bashed the XXX out of me (partner of a number of years)".*

> *"I used at work a few times, realised no-one noticed, I got more done, so I just kept using."*

Heroin co-dependents

Top of page

Heroin Co-Dependents represent the extreme of all methamphetamine users. They typically use drugs on a daily basis, often several times a day. Drug use is frequently alone, but can also be with others who often have the same drug habits.

They are distinguishable from other dependent groups primarily by their current or past use of heroin. Those who were not currently using heroin were receiving heroin replacement treatment, such as methadone. Their principle mode of administering drugs is intravenously. While users from other dependent sub groups may also inject, Heroin Co-Dependents will often rationalise their motivation for using methamphetamines in this way as more for the psychological fulfilment of the needle, rather than the drug itself as is the case with Meth Devotees and Ice Zealots.

They may use methamphetamines for a number of reasons. The most common of which is the poor availability or quality of heroin, which is becoming an increasing problem for some. Second to this, is the preference to use methamphetamine while on methadone treatment as they are more likely to feel a 'hit' than if they used heroin. Lastly, some claim that methamphetamine helps to balance the docile effects of methadone:

> *"The methadone calms me down, the goey gets me going...I can still do things then while I'm on the methadone".*

Their preferred methamphetamines are base and ice, although usually Heroin Co-Dependents are the least discriminatory of all user groups in this regard.

Of all the user groups, Heroin Co-Dependents are perhaps the most homogenous. Similar to Meth Devotees, Heroin Co-Dependents are typically older than other user groups. They are typically the least functional of all the user groups, often unemployed and of low socio-economic status. Many also suffer a range of co-morbid physical and mental health issues. They are also more likely than other dependents to have a long history of contact with either drug treatment services or providers, such as needle and syringe programs and heroin replacement programs, or the criminal justice system. In many regards, Heroin Co-Dependents often appear to fit the widely held social stereotype of 'junkies'.

Summary of dependent user sub groups across target audiences

Table 8 summarises which of the target audiences are more prevalent in each of the three dependent user sub groups described above.

Table 8: Summary of dependent user sub groups across target audiences

Table 8 is presented as a list in this HTML version for accessibility reasons. It is presented as a table in the PDF version.

Summary of dependent user sub groups (ice zealots, meth devotees and heroin co-dependents) across target audiences:

- Young (18-24)
  - n/a
- Uni students

    - n/a
- Rave partiers
    - n/a
- General (25+)
    - Ice zealots **
    - Meth devotees **
    - Heroin co-dependents **
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual
    - n/a
- Drivers
    - Meth devotees *
- Construction/labour
    - Ice zealots *
    - Meth devotees *
- Hospitality
    - Ice zealots *
- Rural/regional
    - n/a
- Sex workers
    - Meth devotees *

Key: * indicate where target audiences also used in this context, but to a lesser extent.
** indicate the target audiences where usage was most prevalent.

Top of page

---

[17] The social experience of sharing the methamphetamine pipe is also commented on in McKetin, R., 2007, in *Illicit Drug Use in Australia: Epidemiology, use patterns and associated harm*, (2nd edition), Ross, J., (ed), National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre, 2007

[18] Leshner, Dr A.,Director of the National Institute of Drug Abuse within the US National Institute of Health, the essence of drug addiction on NIDA website

[19] Also stated in McKetin, R., 2007, in *Illicit Drug Use in Australia: Epidemiology, use patterns and associated harm*, (2nd edition), Ross, J., (ed), National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre, 2007

[20] McKetin, et al., 2005, cited in, in Illicit Drug Use in Australia: Epidemiology, use patterns and associated harm, (2nd edition), Ross, J., (ed), National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre, 2007, also identified this particular sub group in a discussion of who uses ice.

[21] Also found in McKetin et al., 2005, cited in *Illicit Drug Use in Australia: Epidemiology, use patterns and associated harm*, (2nd edition), Ross, J., (ed), National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre, 2007

Top of page